1: Wilson E-5 (1934-1938) 1951 FN17 Ngonde FN17
Nyakyusa



inheriting their stepmothers. Where circumcision is practised a grown woman scorns sex relations with an uncircumcised boy, therefore uncircumcised youths are not potential lovers of their fathers' junior wives; but with the Nyakyusa there is no ceremony to mark the sexual maturity of a male, and adolescent youths are acceptable to young married women of their own age. And not only does the wide difference in the age of men and girls at first marriage allow of a high degree of polygyny, but the very early bethrothal of girls (over whom their future husbands have exclusive sexual rights except during the initiation ritual) means that there are very few girls available to the unmarried men. The institution of girls' huts (*isaka*) has disappeared among the Nyakyusa owing to the lack of nubile girls who are not already betrothed, and the period of seclusion at initiation (when betrothed girls are available to men other than their husbands) is short. The contrast with Nguni society, in which girls do not marry until sixteen to twenty-two, and have several years of great sex freedom before marriage[1] is marked. We suggest that it is because unmarried girls are so scarce and lusty bachelors so many, that the seduction of the wives of polygynists is frequent, and homosexual practices are general.[2] Nyakyusa insist that formerly seduction was rare,[3] and possibly the impulse towards it was indeed less strong when girls married rather later and *isaka* existed (*vide supra*, p. 87).

Lastly, the Nyakyusa permit the inheritance of a father's widows by his sons, a practice regarded as improper by certain other peoples (e.g. the Pondo[4]) who practise the levirate. A son is required to treat all his father's wives as 'mothers' while his father and father's full brothers are alive, and intercourse with a father's wife is treated as a heinous offence necessitating special purification; but after the death of the father and his full brothers these same women become wives of their former 'sons'—with the limitation that a man cannot inherit his own mother or her kins-

[1] Hunter, op. cit., pp. 180-6; M. Kohler, *Marriage Customs in Southern Natal*, pp. 40-44; H. Kuper, *An African Aristocracy*, pp. 133-6.

[2] H. H. Johnston, *British Central Africa*, p. 408 (footnote), knew that similar practices exist among the Nyamland Tonga and elsewhere *before* adolescence only. The Nyakyusa certainly continue after puberty.

[3] MacKenzie, op. cit., p. 63, states that the acknowledged child of an adulterous union was openly put to death.

[4] Hunter, op. cit., p. 211.

2:Wilson E-5 (1934-1938)1957 FN17 Ngonde FN17
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844 behind the huts, moving inside after delivery, on to a litter of banana leaves spread for her. Her mother-in-law attends her and treats her and the new-born child with *ikipiki* medicine. She washes them in a basin made of two banana leaves, one sweet banana, one plantain, and is particularly careful to wash the infant's mouth and the mother's vagina. Powdered *ikipiki* is sprinkled in the water in the form of a cross. This is done 'that the mother and child should not have diarrhœa'. The cross is a symbol of overstepping (*kukulijana kuno, kukukilanya kuno*, demonstrating a cross) and is made 'because heavy ones, those who are with their husbands on the bed, will come and overstep the mother and child if they are not treated'. Mother and child are also given a roasted banana with powdered *ikipiki* sprinkled on it. In bringing the *ikipiki* the husband's mother acknowledges the legitimacy of the child. 'If someone does not give a child *ikipiki* it is a bastard. It is as if the husband said: "Why do you insult your husband by committing adultery with others? Others have created this foetus; it is not mine!" '

The cord is tied with a shred of bark-cloth and then cut with a bamboo knife. 'An iron knife is taboo, it's a spear, other children will die from the spear disease (*ulukuwge*); to use a spear is like killing someone.' The after-birth is buried in the banana plantation with a piece of the cord sticking up, and later the litter is burnt at the same place. 'Only officiants (*abanyago*) eat of these bananas growing over the burying place—no young person may do so for it's the banana grove of the litter.' The cord must be buried upright or 'the mother will not bear again'.

845 A delayed delivery is most commonly attributed to the woman's
775 adultery,[1] and she is pressed by the midwife to confess the name of her lover or lovers, but it is also believed that it may be due to *imizuka*, that is the shades. The husband consults a diviner who indicates whether the *imizuka* is on his side or that of the woman's father and the one who is thus indicated should pray. 'Sometimes the woman [illegible] tells of a quarrel which would lead to *imizuka* and then her husband or father goes to pray.'

846 Mother and child remain in confinement until the navel cord drops off, sheltered from 'heavy ones', who should not enter or even greet the mother from the doorway, and from men, to whom both mother and child are dangerous. 'Men must not see a tiny

[1] Unlike certain other Central African peoples, the Nyakyusa do not attribute difficulty in childbirth to the adultery of the husband.

2: Wilson E-5 (1934-1938)1957 FN17 Ngonde FN17
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him. They fear that if heavy ones come and speak, those who are pregnant, the child will suffer, it will become weak and exhausted on the litter, and will have constant diarrhœa. So they go to the cross-roads and mix millet flour and powdered *ikipiki* with the feather of a chicken, they give the child some in his mouth to make the motions firm, and close the bowels. They do this[1] at the cross-roads that those who pass may step over it and take the disease away. That medicine closes the bowel, it saves the stomach and bowel when heavy ones come, those who are pregnant. If we do not treat it the child becomes exhausted with diarrhœa, though the mother is all right.

It is taboo to give birth in the house, a woman bears a child outside on a pile of leaves; when she has borne the child they sprinkle powdered *ikipiki* on those leaves, but if I, the father, am angry about the child I refuse the *ikipiki*, saying: 'It's not my child, it's a bastard.' That is of old though. Now, in European times, they treat all children. Yes, now all are my children; formerly there were bastards. The *ikipiki* is our blood, it is kept in the senior wife's house.

There was some disagreement on this point. Nayani, an elderly man who was already married before Europeans came to the country, when asked: 'Do you perform rituals for bastards?' replied: 'Yes, they are born with[2] my cattle (*Bapapigwe nasumbi ganga*).' Four other men who discussed the matter together, agreed that—

> When a woman has borne an illegitimate child we know that the child is the child of her husband because it was born with his cattle (*nasumbi gake*). Whether the child is a boy or a girl, whether the genitor is known or unknown, and whether he has paid damages or not, the children belong to the woman's lord (*nasumbi akilolo*). When an illegitimate child is born to an unmarried girl her fathers perform the ritual, for that 'man of the long grass' is like a bull. For an illegitimate child born to a married woman the rituals are performed by the husband, for the 'man of the long grass' is like a bull or a cock. Who is going to give a calf to a man alone, the bull who begot it?

But Lyandileko who, as a doctor and a grandmother, was intimately concerned in such matters, insisted:

> If a woman has committed adultery and we do not know the man, we give her earth; it's just rubbish. If I give her medicine she and the child will die. If she has borne the child in the long grass and her father refuses to let her enter the house, non-relatives give it to her. If I, the mother, am there I give her this earth [touching the ground].

[1] The baby is not taken to the cross-roads, only the *ikipiki* and millet flour.
[2] Literally suckle.

2: Wilson E-5 (1934-1938)1957 F?617 Ngonde F?617
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865 If a woman has difficulty in labour we officiants tell her: 'Speak!
713 With whom did you commit adultery?' and the child comes down. When she has spoken it is born. We do not give her medicine. We give her earth.

● 898 QUESTION: What if an illegitimate boy dies, do you perform the ritual with *ikipili*?

LYANDILIKO: No, because he was a child of the long grass [i.e. illegitimate], we only treat the mother. We do not perform the ritual with the *ikipili* of the husband. If it is a girl, and she to whom we gave earth grows up, the father [i.e. her mother's husband or, if the mother was unmarried, her father] says: 'Let the husband perform the ritual, because the cattle are mine, she is my child, and that is the custom.' If they give a child of the long grass the medicine it will die, because it is not its medicine. . . . I know about it because I give children the medicine.

There is no question about the legal rights over an illegitimate child, and Nyasi and the other men held that ritual and legal control went together. Lyandiliko and Kasitile, both specialists in this field, held that traditionally, at least, the *ikipili* could only be used for a legitimate child: to do otherwise was dangerous.

So important is this acknowledgement of legitimacy that in many Christian families, where other traditional rituals are ignored, the husband's mother still brings *ikipili* for his child.

851 As soon as the child is born a fowl—a cock for a boy, a hen for a girl—is sent to the young wife's parents, to notify them of the birth. Then her 'mothers' come 'to keep her company' (*ukumpanje*) during her confinement, and at the end of it they take her home with them for a visit of a month or more. They bring her back to her husband, formally, with gifts of beer, food, and mats (*ulwendeke*), just as they did after the puberty ritual. We met one party, taking back a young mother to her husband, in which there were twenty-one women carrying baskets with food or pots of beer. The grandmother was happy and excited and, dancing up to greet us, she said, breathlessly: '*That's* the owner of this beer [pointing to her daughter], all these pots!' The feast was unusually lavish on this occasion. Two pots of beer, two stems of bananas, a vessel of milk, and a mat, were taken by the daughter of Chief Mwaipopo when she returned to her husband after the birth of her first child, and that seems to be the ordinary standard. The husband kills a bull calf for meat for his guests, or gives them a shilling or two.

3: Mackenzie M-5 (ca. 1925) 1925
FN17 Ngonde FN17



he takes such children away, leaving a cow as payment 586
to his late wife for bringing them up. The frantic appeals of the mother, when her child is being taken away from her, make a most distressing scene. I have been implored by mothers, kneeling at my feet, or rolling on the ground in agony, to intercede for them; but native and British law here coincide, and, apart from an appeal to the husband to forego his rights, nothing can be done. And any interference is inadvisable for the child's own sake, for there is reason to suspect that fathers deprived of what they consider their rights, take measures quietly to put the children to death. In the past the acknowledged [816] •
child of adultery was openly put to death; to-day the husband may claim it if it is a girl, for a girl is "cattle"; but a boy he, in most cases, entirely ignores.

There is formally no limit to the number of wives 595
a man may have, except the limit of his ability to part with cattle. But while polygamy was always lawful, it was not always expedient: warriors were often monogamous in practice until they reached an age when but little fighting was likely to be expected of them. And there were always men who never had more than one wife, two being a very common number for others. While there is a sentiment among some women in favour of monogamy, it is a very slow growth. There are women who will not marry Christians, because the wife of a Christian, being alone, has to do all the work, whereas in the other case, many wives make light work for each.

8:W Leon E-5 (1934-1936)1936 FN17 Ngonde FN17
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property possessions. A young man is given cows by his father and sends them to his father-in-law; his father's income in cattle is derived partly from the increase of his own stock, but chiefly from the marriages of his own and his brothers' sisters and daughters, for it is the custom for full-brothers and half-brothers to give one another cows as their daughters and sisters get married; the young man's father-in-law gives the cows which he receives some to his brothers, some to his sons, and some he keeps himself. And thus, communally, the cattle are driven down the paths of human relationship.

The passage of cattle makes the children of a marriage legitimate members of their father's family; the sons can inherit from their father, and the daughters, when they marry in their turn, bring cattle to him. But if a woman bears a child to a man who has given no cows for her, the child is illegitimate, has no right of inheritance anywhere, and belongs either to her husband or father, not to its own biological sire.

Getting married is not a single event; the marriage-cattle are seldom handed over all at once, but in one, two, or three over a period of years; and a girl very commonly goes to visit and sleep with her betrothed husband, from time to time, for several years before she finally sets up home with him and begins to bear his children. There are three ways of getting married: (1) by negotiation with the girl's father (2) by running off with an unmarried girl (3) by running off with a married woman. The first is the ideal, usually approved, method and is not uncommonly followed. The negotiations often begin while the girl is still an infant, sometimes even before she is born: the man sends one or two cows to her father to bespeak her (*ukwingula*). These cows are counted as part of the marriage-cattle (*ingwelo*) and the girl is henceforth called his "wife," but she lives at home with her parents. Sometimes a boy is betrothed by his father while he himself is still young, but always, I think, to a girl several years his junior. Such betrothals are determined by the friendship of the two families. A girl who is bespoken in infancy does not, ideally, go to live altogether with her husband till after she has reached puberty and passed through the elaborate initiation which then takes place. But there is an intermediate period when, from the age of ten or earlier, she is allowed to visit and sleep with her husband from time to time. The man sends a bull or a box to her father to ask for his wife (*ukwendukila*), and the old man agrees to let her go on occasional visits. But she is seldom allowed to go until at least three cows, in all, have been received for her. She is not supposed to be delivered before puberty and she and her husband always, at first, practise limited intercourse without penetration. Not infrequently, however, full intercourse

8:W Leon E-5 (1934-1936)1936 FN17 Ngonde FN17
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over ends to the spirits, but when some member of a family or his wife or child falls sick the anger of the spirits is often suspected as a possible cause. There are usually other reasons suspected as well, and so the sickness is taken to a diviner for diagnosis. Various causes are suggested to the diviner and he selects one among them. If the anger of the spirits is selected then this senior kinsman must pray for the one who is sick, if he is to recover. When half-brothers live at a distance from one another, after their father and his brothers have died, then each may pray to the spirits to cure a little sickness in his own family but if the sickness persists then a message must be sent to the senior kinsman. And, as the anger of the spirits is due to wrong doing, the sinner must reform his ways as well.

The wrongs which cause the spirits to anger are usually breaches of family morality. If a son does not respect his father or insults him, if an heir neglects to feed and provide for the dead man's children, then when sickness falls on him or his own children it will probably be traced to the anger of the spirits at his behaviour.

Space does not allow any full analysis of religion in family life and in the relationships of kinsmen and affines. Not only the ancestor cult but witchcraft and magic are factors in them. A man's neglect of a wife or his cruelty to her may, it is believed, lead to his falling sick through her witchcraft and that of sympathetic neighbours; his relations with his father-in-law are affected by the fear that if he offends him, his father-in-law may, by magical means, kill his children, and so on.

Wider kinship groupings than the family gather at ceremonies and are recognized in the rules against incest. But there are no clans; there is no descent group continuous down the generations with a common name and definite membership. Each individual family has its own personnel of kinsfolk, the effective kindred of a man and his son, or of two half-brothers are not all the same, while each single person is especially related by respect, affection and mutual obligations to particular kinsmen beyond his own family. Descent, as we have seen, is patrilineal except in the case of illegitimate children. A man asked for his *abakolo* always recites first the names of his paternal forbears as far as he can remember. But if he is related through mother or grandmother to a chief he usually volunteers this fact as part of his *abakolo*; and questions always elicit some knowledge of his mother's paternal kinsfolk and a statement that "they are my *abakolo* too." Descendants of a common grandfather (either paternal or maternal) are to-day forbidden to marry, and no case of infringement has come to my notice; descendants of a common great-grandfather are supposed not to marry but, I am told,